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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 RIO DE JANEIRO 000030

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR CA/FPP
DPET PLEASE PASSD TO DHS CIS WASHINGTON (RON THOMAS)
DEPT ALSO PLS PASS TO DHS ICE BOSTON

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: KFRD CVIS ASEC PINR MX BR
SUBJECT: MAYOR-ELECT ACCUSED OF LEADING SMUGGLING RING

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED

Summary

¶1. (SBU) The respected Brazilian daily Folha de Sao Paulo reports that the mayor-elect of a small city in the Brazilian state of Minas Gerais is leading a family-run smuggling operation that sends Brazilian nationals to the United States via Mexico. According to Folha, the operation is run from a travel agency the mayor owns in Danbury, Connecticut, home to an estimated 20,000 - strong Brazilian community. Several persons interviewed in the articles provided details about the operation, including the agency's address and description. A check with DHS revealed that someone with the same name as the mayor-elect, Edson Alves da Souza, listed the travel agency's locale as a home address in the US and received a Connecticut driver's license (now expired) and US Social Security number. On the other hand, our records show only visa denials. The mayor-elect, interviewed by the newspaper, denied any involvement in alien-smuggling. Post has passed this information to DHS. End Summary.

The Connecticut Connection

¶2. (U) The newspaper reported that the mayor-elect of Divino das Laranjeiras, Minas Gerais (population 5000), has been operating a smuggling ring whereby Brazilians are smuggled to the US overland via Mexico. The mayor-elect, Edson Bodola (real name Edson Alves de Souza) apparently owns a travel agency in Danbury, CT which serves as a front for the operation. The business, Lider Travel Services, functions out of two rented rooms at the back of a clothing store on 255 Main Street in Danbury. According to the articles, most of those smuggled hail from the Mayor-elect's home-town and have relatives in or around Danbury. Divino das Laranjeiras is located next to the city of Governador Valadares, infamous throughout Brazil as a center for the production of fraudulent documents. It is estimated that tens, perhaps hundreds of thousands of Minas Gerais residents have relatives on the US eastern seaboard; US engineers came to Minas after World War II, and many took Brazilian spouses (?) back to the US upon return.

¶3. (U) Relatives of de Souza told Folha that he charges his customers \$10,000 per trip, of which twenty percent remains with him as "commission." Would-be illegal immigrants are first transported to Mexico, where they embark on an overland journey. The price of the trip is supposed to include transport, food, and housing along the way, but one relative of de Souza's who works at the Danbury agency -- her real name did not appear in the article -- criticized him for not taking adequate care of his clients. Apparently, several had been left to fend for themselves while making an arduous trip across the desert; in one case, de Souza allegedly refused to assist a nephew after his release from American detention. He had been captured after a 17-hour desert walk.

¶4. (U) The female relative was quoted in the paper as saying the mayor-elect turned over operations to his brother Kiko after winning the municipal election. Edson de Souza, contacted separately by the paper, denied all involvement in any BRAZILIAN ROAD TO U.S.: EASIER THRU MEXICO?smuggling ring but advised the reporter to talk to his brother.

Family Reunion On Main Street?

¶5. (SBU) Despite not having received a visa from the Department of State, it is possible that Alves de Souza spent significant time in the U.S. In February 1993, a person using this name presented a fraudulent photo-subbed passport at the Miami airport and was returned

to Brazil. Post reports two other refusals under the subject's name, including a P6C1 (misrepresentation) hit entered in April 1998. However, a check with DHS revealed that someone using the name Edson Alves de Souza listed 255 Main Street, Danbury as his home address in the years 2000 and 2001. This person obtained a CT driver's license (#106149996, expired October 23, 2003) and a social security card (044-84-3514).

¶6. (SBU) A DHS official also told us that his records show a certain Fernando Cezar Pereira also listing 255 Main as his address during that time. Our records show this individual was denied a visa at US Consulate Rio under ineligibility P6c1 on the same day in 1998 as Edson Alves de Souza. However, DHS informs us that Fernando Cezar Pereira was issued a valid S-26 card certifying him as a special agricultural worker in ¶2002. In addition, several other individuals with De Souza/Pereira surnames have listed the Danbury, CT address as their home.

Comment

¶7. (SBU) Such smuggling rings are probably fairly common in Minas Gerais, a state infamous as the epicenter of fraud in Brazil. Nevertheless, the involvement of a public figure (albeit in a small town) with political ambitions is rare. We have discussed these allegations with the officials from DHS should they decide to take further action.

ATKINS